

MONDAY 04 April 2022 "Hope in Tragedy"

Matthew 14:1-24

Good morning my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

Today is day 28 in the 40-day journey we are traveling with Jesus toward His Easter. *As you and I look around the world today, I wonder what stands out to you as significant when you consider what you know is going on in South America, or Africa, or Asia, or the Middle East, or Europe or the Americas?* Let's join Jesus and His disciples today in a series of events which all happened in the course of one long day and may reflect quite well how Jesus was teaching these men to respond to the turmoil of their day. There are important lessons for us today...

Matthew records the events of this remarkable day in his chapter 14. Look with me at verse 13: **"When Jesus heard what had happened, He withdrew by boat privately, to a solitary place."** *How do you respond when you hear tragic news that touches your heart deeply?* The news Jesus heard that day was horrific, and Matthew describes it in the first 12 verses of that chapter. What news? The news that John the Baptist, Jesus' friend, and the man who had been preparing the people of Israel for Jesus with his preaching and his baptizing, **was dead!** John had been imprisoned because he spoke publicly against the audacious affair King Herod was having with the wife of his brother! Herod had John arrested and then executed in a grotesque way at the request of his mistress' daughter at a dinner party. John's head was actually brought into the banquet on a platter!

Jesus was so repulsed by this news that He needed some alone time with God to process and grieve, thus Jesus took a small boat, by Himself, out onto Lake Galilee. So, I ask again, how do you respond when you hear tragic news which rips your heart? *Jesus was teaching His disciples a very important lesson: there is a safe place to go with your pain, your anger at injustice, your deep remorse...* and that place is NOT social media nor the picket line nor violent retribution. **The wise place to go first with heartbreak is into the Throne room of God.** God understands the situation far better than you for He has seen EVERYTHING related to the tragedy which tears your heart. Furthermore, God will hold accountable everyone involved in the tragedy with tears your heart, according to Hebrews 4:13... **"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before HIM to whom we must give account."** Jesus had heard heart wrenching news, so He went to meet with God the Father who knew the whole story and who would hold accountable everyone involved. *In that place PEACE comes into our broken hearts, as we trust God with the tragedy!* Have you learned that important life lesson yet?

Matthew tells us the people were insensitive to what was happening. Perhaps they hadn't heard the same news Jesus had heard. Maybe their own needs seemed more important to them.

Matthew writes: **"Hearing this, the crowds followed Jesus on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them and healed their sick."** (Matt. 14:13,14) As the disciples watched this they were stunned, I'm sure! How could Jesus release His grief to God and respond to insensitive, needy, selfish people with such compassion? Again, I have a question for us... *what is the journey you normally walk when you are nearly overwhelmed with deep, heart wrenching grief?* How long does it take you to 'recover' from tragic news and get on with your life? Do you see what Jesus was teaching His disciples?

Tragic news is part of life isn't it my friends? We all need to develop a tragedy response process if we are not going to be devastated, immobilized by tragic news. Jesus was teaching His men that the depth of their authentic relationship with God will be measured by how they handle tragedy. If God is all powerful, all knowing, all loving and Sovereign over all things at all times in all places, then Jesus knew He could bring this tragedy to God, entrust His pain to God and invite God to heal His pain and deal with the tragedy. *That allowed Jesus to turn His attention away from the tragedy, about which He could do nothing, and return to His mission of making a difference in this world by bringing God's help to people in need.* Have you and I learned that yet my friends? Once Jesus put all this in words as He said: **"Come to Me all you who are burdened and weary and I will give you rest."** (Matt. 11:28)

So rather than turning away from the crowd of people, who seemed so insensitive to Jesus' personal pain, Jesus went to work healing sick people, driving out demons who held people in bondage, and preaching God's wonderful, life changing truth to this huge crowd. *Have you learned that serving others when you are in pain, is one way God heals your heart?* Evidently the crowd was so large it took several hours for Jesus to meet all the needs and as late afternoon approached Jesus knew they were all hungry, including Himself and His disciples. Jesus was watching. *Remember Jesus was trying to maximize every opportunity to teach these disciples He had selected how to live and think like Jesus!*

Matthew doesn't name who did it, perhaps it was him, but some disciples evidently came to Jesus and said **"This is a remote place and it's getting late. Send the people away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves food."** I can see Jesus looking over the huge crowd spread out across the hillside. That made sense. No one had thought this day would last so long, and no provision had been made and everyone was hungry. What would you have recommended to Jesus, my friends?

John tells us in his account of this event: **"Jesus said to Philip, 'where shall we buy bread for all these people to eat?' Philip answered Jesus, 'It would take more than 8 months wages to buy enough bread for each one here to have only one bite!'"** (John 6:5-7) Perhaps Jesus told His 12 disciples to walk around among the crowd, evaluate the situation and come back with some ideas. Evidently Andrew found a little boy whose mother had thoughtfully packed him a little lunch for the day. John reports: **"Andrew said, 'Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will that go among so many people?'"**

Oh, my friends, this is one time of many in the story of Jesus, that I wish I had been there to watch what happened next.

Can you see Jesus getting down low to chat with this little lad, as the boy clutches his little lunch? Maybe Jesus said something like this: *"Hi, my name is Jesus, what's yours? Have you enjoyed this day watching all the amazing things God is doing here? I'm so glad your mother planned ahead so you have a lunch to eat, but have you noticed no one else has anything and they are all hungry, just like you and Me. I wonder, would you be willing to share your lunch, if God could multiply it so everyone here could have some? Can you see the look on the little boy's face as he looks at Jesus, then the disciples who've gathered around, then out across the hillside at thousands of people, then into his little pouch at those tiny biscuits and minnows? How long do you suppose it took that boy to hand over his lunch?"*

Jesus took that lunch, lifted it up before God, prayed asking God to multiply it and began tearing the bread and fish and soon baskets were full, and the disciples were going through the crowds handing out bread and fish! What a remarkable miracle was happening here, and all the while I imagine the little boy stood right beside Jesus watching his little lunch feed a huge throng of people! Eventually the disciples came back from the crowd with plenty left in their baskets so both the boy and Jesus could have all they wanted! John writes: ***"When the people had all had enough to eat Jesus told His disciples to gather up all the leftovers. 'Let nothing be wasted' Jesus said. And they filled 12 big baskets full of pieces of the five barley loaves..."*** (John 6:12,13) I've often wondered what story that boy told his family when he got home that night?

Maybe the more important question is this: *what did the disciples learn that day about handling grief and responding to the needs of others even when your own heart is breaking? What did they learn about understanding how God can use even little things to help meet big needs?*

Today's Scripture is Matthew 14:1-24.